

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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INTERIOR, CEQ RELEASE ADVISORY COMMITTEE STUDY REPORT ON PREDATOR CONTROL

Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton and Russell E. Train, Chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality today announced the release of an independent study report on predator control programs across the country. The report recommends stopping use of poisons for control of predatory wildlife.

The report -- prepared by an Advisory Committee of seven eminent scientists -- cited evidence that large scale use of poisons for controlling predators and field rodents has led to losses of "non-target" animals that are beneficial and necessary to natural ecological systems.

Findings in the report were considered in the recommendations made to President Nixon for the initiatives he is taking in his 1972 Message on the Environment, Morton and Train said.

The committee preparing the report was appointed last May by the Department and the Council and chaired by Dr. Stanley Cain of the University of Michigan, a member of the National Academy of Sciences and former Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks.

It conducted the first study ever commissioned by the Federal Government to look into the entire predator control situation Nationwide; an earlier independent study team appointed by the Secretary of the Interior in 1964 investigated only Interior-managed lands and programs.

Dr. Cain's committee reviewed numerous scientific studies; contacted nearly 400 persons for views and information; analyzed Federal, State and local animal control activities; evaluated direct and indirect effects, including environment impacts and effects on the livestock industry, and examined various alternative approaches.

The study report says the Advisory Committee found little solid information about actual losses of livestock to predators. It concluded that poisons for killing predatory animals "have been introduced to millions of acres of range and forest lands on a largely speculative basis."

Recommending expanded research on ecological and economic aspects of this problem, the committee strongly recommended abandonment of "prophylactic" programs of predator control in favor of "target animal" methods using no poisons and seeking to control only those specific animals which are threatening livestock.

The Committee also strongly recommended prohibiting the "broadcast" use of poisons against rodents and other vertebrate pests, and urged a ban on the field use of poisons which cause a secondary poisoning effect -- killing creatures which feed on poisoned animals.

The current predatory animal control program is carried out by the Interior Department as directed by Congress, and is an outgrowth of a program that began 57 years ago to protect sheep on Forest Service lands from coyotes. Sheep ranchers are the chief beneficiaries of the program, now accounting for \$8 million in Federal, State, and local funds under cooperative agreements with Interior.

Among the Advisory Committee's other chief recommendations in the report:

--Federal-State cooperation in predator control should be continued, but only with funds appropriated by Congress and State legislatures.

--All predator control on statutory Wilderness areas should be prohibited.

--The possibility of a predator damage insurance program should be studied as a replacement for predator control programs.

--Meanwhile, such programs should be handled by qualified biologists; land owners should be offered training in use of traps instead of poisons.

--Interior should have authority to protect predators on the Federal Endangered Species List, and States should take legislative and other measures to supplement Federal protection of such species.

--Grazing permits and leases on public lands should be subject to suspension or revocation if regulations governing predator control are violated.

--Shooting of predators and other wildlife from aircraft should be restricted by State and Federal legislation; pilots who knowingly aid in such violations, or who distribute poisons in violation of laws and regulations should be subject to suspension or revocation of their licenses and confiscation of aircraft.

--More Federal research should be conducted in ecological problems of predators, socio-economic aspects of predator control and epidemiology of rabies.

A limited number of copies of the report are available by writing to the Director, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Department of the Interior, Washington, D. C. 20240, or from the Council on Environmental Quality, 722 Jackson Place, N.W., Washington, D. C. 20006.